

1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey

Data Preview VII: Racial/Ethnic Subgroups

Following are results from the 1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The survey employed 2 questionnaires, each administered by telephone to a national sample of approximately 4,000 randomly selected persons age 16 and older. Interviewing began November 5, 1998, and continued through January 12, 1999. The data are weighted to yield national estimates. Detailed results from the survey will be published later in a series of NHTSA reports.

Defining Groups For Analysis

The survey employed two questions to identify ethnic and racial background. The first asked respondents if they considered themselves to be Hispanic or Latino. Those who said "Yes" composed the Hispanic analytic subgroup in the study. The second question recited several different racial categories, and asked respondents which categories described them. Respondents could select more than one. For purposes of analysis, a respondent was assigned to a specific racial category if s/he selected only that category. The few respondents who selected multiple categories were considered as a separate group.

Crash Injury Experience

Twenty-eight percent of all persons age 16 and older have been injured in a motor vehicle crash at some time in the past. This is higher than in past versions of the survey, largely due to inclusion of a new follow-up question devised to capture persons who might have omitted injuries as passengers, pedestrians, or bicyclists. The Table on back shows whites (29%) and blacks (28%) more likely than Hispanics (21%) to report having experienced a crash injury that required medical attention.

General Driving

Blacks (21%) and Hispanics (23%) were more than three times as likely as whites (6%) to be non-drivers. Whereas 82% of whites said they drove almost every day, less than two-thirds of blacks (66%) and Hispanics (65%) said the same.

Attitudes And Behaviors About Seat Belt Use

Most black (75%), Hispanic (85%), and white (79%) drivers reported that they wore their seat belt all the time while driving. The perceived utility of seat belts was also high as 86% of blacks, 91% of Hispanics, and

85% of whites strongly agreed with the statement "if I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on."

Yet other items pointed to a more fatalistic outlook among blacks and Hispanics. About one-half of blacks (49%) and Hispanics (51%) either strongly or somewhat agreed that "seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you," compared to 35% of whites. Similarly, 40% of blacks, 31% of Hispanics, and 25% of whites agreed that "if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt." Seat belts may also raise anxieties among these groups as 25% of blacks, 27% of Hispanics, and 11% of whites either strongly or somewhat agreed that "putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident." Moreover, blacks (25%) and Hispanics (44%) were more likely than whites (13%) to strongly or somewhat agree that "I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not."

Support For Traffic Safety Laws

As shown in the Table, blacks and Hispanics tended to voice greater support for traffic safety laws than whites. At the same time, blacks (19%) and Hispanics (21%) were more likely than whites (16%) in the study to report being stopped by police in the past year for a traffic-related reason while driving, although the numbers of black and Hispanic drivers asked the question were too few for the differences to be statistically significant.



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		Black	Hispanic	White
**Have you ever been injured in a motor vehicle accident? Only count injuries that required medical attention.	Yes	28%	21%	29%
	No	72%	78%	71%
	Don't Know/Refused	*	*	*
How often do you drive a motor vehicle?	Almost Every Day	66%	65%	82%
	A Few Days A Week	9%	9%	10%
	A Few Days A Month	2%	2%	1%
	A Few Days A Year	1%	1%	1%
	Never	21%	23%	6%
***When driving this (vehicle), how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?	All The Time	75%	85%	79%
	Most Of The Time	13%	9%	12%
	Some Of The Time	8%	3%	5%
	Rarely	2%	1%	2%
	Never	2%	2%	2%
How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?	Favor A Lot	74%	82%	65%
	Favor Some	20%	13%	20%
	Not Favor At All	5%	5%	15%
	Don't Know/Refused	1%	*	1%
In your opinion, should police be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being broken?	Should Be Allowed	61%	73%	56%
	Should Not Be Allowed	36%	25%	41%
	Don't Know/Refused	4%	2%	3%
What about when children outgrow a child car seat? Do you agree or disagree that they should be required by law to wear seat belts when riding in a vehicle?	Agree	93%	95%	94%
	Disagree	3%	2%	4%
	Depends On Age	2%	2%	1%
	Don't Know/Refused	1%	1%	1%
Do you favor or oppose laws which require children to wear bicycle helmets?	Favor	87%	87%	80%
	Oppose	9%	9%	13%
	Depends	3%	1%	3%
	Don't Know/Refused	1%	3%	4%
Do you favor or oppose mandatory helmet use laws for motorcyclists?	Favor	89%	85%	79%
	Oppose	6%	11%	17%
	Don't Know/Refused	6%	4%	4%

